

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1340
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN
USIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0329

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, PLO, XF
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ASAD IN TIME INTERVIEW EXPRESSES NEW
FLEXIBILITY RE PLO PARTICIPATION IN GENEVA

1. SUMMARY: IN TIME MAGAZINE INTERVIEW, PRES. ASAD HAS
REVEALED SURPRISING FLEXIBILITY RE PLO PARTICIPATION IN
GENEVA. ALSO REITERATED FAMILIAR POSITIONS ON DEMILITARIZATION
AND UN TROOP PRESENCE ON GOLAN, AND WILLINGNESS TO SIGN
PEACE DOCUMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. PRES. ASAD'S INTERVIEW WITH TIME CORRESPONDENT WILTON
WYNN, WHICH TOOK PLACE AFTERNOON JAN. 14 AND HEADLINED IN
LOCAL MEDIA JAN. 17, WAS AT SYRIAN INITIATIVE IN RESPONSE
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TO REQUEST SUBMITTED BY WYNN LAST NOVEMBER. ASAD MADE
FOLLOWING
KEY POINTS:

A. PLO ABSENCE FROM GENEVA CONFERENCE WOULD NOT PARALYZE
ACTIVITY BY ARAB COUNTRIES AT CONFERENCE;

B. UN EMERGENCY FORCE OR OBSERVATION FORCE ALONG LINE SEPARATING ISRAELIS AND SYRIANS IS NEGOTIABLE AS LONG AS UN PRESENCE IS ON BOTH SIDES OF LINE. DEMILITARIZED ZONES ALSO POSSIBLE ON SAME CONDITION (ASAD VOLUNTEERED THIS WITHOUT PROMPTING BY WYNN);

C. SYRIA FAVORS ESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE AND SUPPORTS LINK BETWEEN IT AND JORDAN IF THIS SATISFACTORY TO BOTH SIDES;

D. IN CONTEXT OF FINAL SETTLEMENT, SYRIA WOULD AGREE TO SIGN DOCUMENT ENDING STATE OF BELLIGERENCY. ASAD REITERATED THAT DOCUMENT TO BE SIGNED SHOULD BE A PEACE DOCUMENT;

E. CONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE MAY BE DELAYED BEYOND MARCH DEADLINE, BUT ENERGETIC U.S. PEACE INITIATIVE TO RECONVENE GENEVA WOULD BE WELCOME.

3. WYNN TELLS US FOLLOWING Q AND A DELETED FROM TIME TRANSCRIPT AS EDITED IN NEW YORK: QTE. IF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE IS CONVENED, WILL YOU INSIST ON THE PLO PARTICIPATING FROM THE VERY BEGINNING? ANSWER: I DON'T THINK WE ARE REQUIRED TO GO INTO A DISCUSSION OF THE FORM NOW. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THERE SHOULD BE A PARTICIPATION BY THE PLO IN THE PEACE EFFORTS AND IN THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, SO LONG AS THE WORLD IS SEEKING TO ACHIEVE A REAL AND JUST PEACE IN THE AREA. UNQTE. IN PUBLISHED TEXT, ASAD LATER REPEATED HIS PREFERENCE
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FOR UNIFIED ARAB DELEGATION, BUT ADDED THIS ISSUE SUBJECT TO DISCUSSION WITH OTHER ARAB PARTIES.

4. WYNN RELATED TO AMBASSADOR FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL COMMENTS WHICH ASAD MADE OFF-RECORD. ACCORDING TO WYNN, ASAD EXHIBITED EVEN MORE FORCEFULNESS PRIVATELY IN PROCLAIMING THAT PALESTINIANS WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO BLOCK EFFORTS TOWARD SETTLEMENT. ASAD ALSO TERMED CREATION OF PALESTINIAN GOVT-IN-EXILE AT PRESENT TIME AS "NONSENSE." CONCERNING REJECTION FRONT, ASAD ASSERTED IT WOULD WITHER AWAY IF FURTHER MOVEMENT TOWARD PEACE ACHIEVED. IN ASAD'S VIEW, PLO "MODERATES" WILL ENHANCE THEIR STRENGTH IF THERE IS PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE.

5. WYNN ASKED ABOUT SYRIAN JEWRY ISSUE, BUT PRES. REPLIED TESTILY, "ISRAELIS WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THIS FROM ME PERSONALLY. THEREFORE, I WILL NOT SAY ANYTHING."

6. COMMENT: ASAD'S VIEW RE PLO PARTICI-

PATION IN GENEVA REPRESENTS DRAMATIC CHANGE IN HIS
LONGSTANDING POSITION. IT GOES BEYOND ANY YET ENUNCIATED
BY SADAT. THIS IS FAR CRY FROM THE ASAD WHO IN OCT. 1975
STATED IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THAT ANY FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS,
WHETHER STEP-BY-STEP, AT CONFERENCE PREPARATORY TO GENEVA OR
AT GENEVA ITSELF, WOULD REQUIRE SYRIA MOVING HAND-IN-HAND
WITH PLO. BEFORE MEETING ASAD, WYNN HAD INTERVIEWED ZUHAYR
MUHSIN. IN THAT CONVERSATION, MUHSIN NOTED PERHAPS
ONE SOLUTION TO CURRENT IMPASSE OVER GENEVA WOULD BE
FOR PLO TO ABSENT ITSELF AND LEAVE NEGOTIATIONS THERE TO ARAB
STATES AND ISRAEL. AT LATER STAGE, PLO WOULD NEGOTIATE ITS
STATUS WITH ARAB STATES. TAKEN TOGETHER, ASAD'S AND
MUHSIN'S COMMENTS INDICATE A NEW TREND IN SYRIAN POLICY
FORMULATION WHICH SARG IS NOW READY TO PUBLICIZE WITH
AMERICAN PUBLIC CLEARLY HIS PRIMARY TARGET.
MURPHY

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